

THE ATHENÆUM.

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*Neque cixquam tam statim clarum ingenium est, ut possit emergere; nisi illi materia, occasio,
fautor etiam, commendatorque contingat.*

PLIN. EPIST.

THE VAGRANT.

No. VII.

What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.

POPE.

THE existence of family greatness, in our country, is plainly discernible. By family greatness, I mean, that eminence possessed by a family, which acquires for its members the respect of those about them, merely because they belong to it, without any consideration of their own particular merit. We have not, it is true, our nobility, who boast of a long line of ancestors, many of them distinguished for their great actions, and who possess an influence on society, from its political institutions: but we have, in almost every town, families who are looked up to by others as superiors, and whose superiority is owing, solely, to the consequence of some one of their ancestors. In many parts of the country, this family greatness is important, even in a political view; for the members of such

a family, by extending its connections, and by other arts of aggrandizement, contrive to keep an influence in the affairs of a community, which gives them a real importance in it for very considerable periods, and this sometimes little inferior to that of the privileged orders of Europe. These families are few; and, in most instances, the greatness of the family ends with the immediate descendants of him who founded it. Even during the limited period by which it is commonly circumscribed, it produces a family pride, which it is, in many cases, amusing to contemplate. As this greatness is merely relative, it is found in the smaller, as well as the more extensive societies; and in proportion to the smallness of the society, is the smallness of the difference which constitutes the distinction. Thus the daughters of the village lawyer, speak of the low family of their neighbour, the trader; while the family of the latter, speak still more contemptuously of that of the blacksmith. This is of

the very same nature with the pride of the nobleman, when he compares himself with the private man ; and if the distance between the families of the village is less than between these, it is viewed by more acute optics, as nature has fitted insects to see roughnesses which cannot be discerned by the lion or the elephant.

This family greatness is most worthy of our notice, when it is possessed by those who are elevated above the middle sphere of life, as almost all examples of the state of society are ; and it may be interesting to observe the rise of such a family from insignificance to respectability and influence.

The founder of a family, whose consequence in the community gives his descendants an elevation above those about them, is commonly a man who, by the exertion of some valuable qualities, has raised himself from poverty and obscurity. He starts on the course of life with vigour, and continues in it with perseverance. Employed, at first, in some humble occupation, by a sedulous attention to the duties of his station, he rises to another grade in consequence, and, by a continuance of the same disposition, he continues to rise higher and higher. His industry is persevering and powerful ; he possesses a frugality, which not only serves immediately to aid him, by preserving his property, but also prevents his engaging in those pleasures which might give him a disrelish to the duties of his occupation. He is enterprising and sagacious ; he seeks out for opportunities, and converts them to his best advantage ; by his prudence, also, he secures them firmly in his possession. Advantages are not neglected because they appear small ; but are eagerly laid hold of,

and so adroitly managed as to become really important. The energy and unshaken perseverance employed in the pursuit of his object, seldom fail to crown his efforts with success ; and, in a moderate period, he becomes distinguished for his wealth, or reputation, and the influence attendant on it.

It is worthy of observation, by all who would enter upon such a course, that those things by which this importance was acquired, are, more commonly, the homely qualities of industry, frugality, and attention to every part of his employment, than the splendid talents on which pride delights to rest her pretensions. Talents, it is true, quicken the progress, when united with them : but if they are alone, they will lose every advantage as soon as it is gained, and, like the Danaides, they will find the water run through their vessel, as soon as they fill it. It is to those qualities alone, that family greatness owes its existence.

After the individual has arrived at an eminence in his society, by his fortune, or made himself important to the community by the possession of ability in his occupation, he finds it easy to obtain the attention and respect of others. For where there is power of any kind, there will be attention paid to its possessor. The humbleness of his origin, the littleness of his early employments, and the meannesses which he may, at times, have practised, are soon passed over by the eye of the spectator, who hastens to fix it on the splendour of wealth and power which now surrounds him. He himself often becomes giddy by his elevation.

The consequence thus obtained, is communicated to the children, as a part of the inheritance of the family :

and men who view them surrounded by splendour from their early life, and who are obliged to be obsequious to them on account of the favour of the parent, acquire an habitual respect for them, which they find it difficult to lay aside, even after their immediate importance is passed away. It is this association of respectability with all those connected with the founder of the family, which gives it its superiority in the eyes of others, as well as its own pride: and even when the founder was distinguished for his talents as much as his wealth, men are very apt to believe that the sons possess the powers of the father, as well as his fortune. Men are very apt to act on the maxim, that *Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis.*

But as it is commonly in one generation that the family becomes noticed, it is also found, that in the next, the eminence obtained is destroyed, and the family reduced to its original level. It would perhaps be supposed at first, that the founder of a family would sedulously endeavour to infix in his children the same qualities which raised himself; that he would urge them to possess industry and frugality, as qualities indispensable to the preservation of their importance. But we find the case, in general, to be very different. Instead of possessing these, they are profuse, slothful, and addicted immoderately to pleasure: their aim seems commonly to be, to make way with the fortune which they possess, and they are usually as successful in it as their parent was in the acquisition of it. The parent too often admires their vices, thinking them to be indications of a noble spirit, which time will cool down into a prudent, but generous liberality. He gives it indulgence,

and seems to think that the expenses of the child are a proof of the greatness and generosity of the parent, as well as of his own high spirit. From a desire of making him keep what the parent considers the best company, he encourages those expensive amusements, to which the opulent and idle resort, and thus gives birth both to profuseness and to dissipated indolence. By those whose character is formed in this manner, fortune is soon wasted: the spendthrift is thrown into the world, without industry, and without frugality; he is continually agitated by desires which he has not the power either to gratify or restrain. He becomes thus one of the most useless, as well as most miserable members of the community. After his fortune has passed away, his consequence is found to have left him also; since men find it difficult to continue a respect towards those who have neither power to command it for their importance in society, nor qualities, as men, to gain it: but who, on the contrary, are not only reduced to a state of actual beggary, but debased by the meanest of vices. The strength of the association which made them respectable, is thus overcome; and although men could give respect when nothing great was possessed, yet they cannot continue it when actual meanness presses itself upon their attention. Such is the common lot of family greatness: the wave rises in one moment, and in the next is broken on the sand.

There are, however, instances in which the importance of a family is not so soon crumbled into insignificance. There are men who discern the real foundations on which respectability must rest; who, by a careful attention to the education of

their children, fit them for the situation in life which they wish them to possess. With moderate capacities, but possessed of habits really useful, the children are able to maintain their respectability and their consequence. They are respected the more on account of the importance of their parents, and this imparts a lustre to their moderate characters, which their own active qualities would perhaps never have obtained. The qualities which *preserve*, are, of themselves, sufficient to maintain a family consequence, and, if actual meanness be kept off, respect will naturally continue in the family.

He, then, who would establish the respectability of a family on a sure foundation, should trust more to the education he bestows on those who are to support it, than to any concurrence of external circumstances, or to any extent of fortune, or dignity of character, which he may himself acquire. To rest the respectability of a family on circumstances alone, which must, from the nature of all things here, be exposed to continual changes, is to depend on a most uncertain basis: to expect that fortune will continue in a family where those who possess it are devoid of prudence, or that it will not diminish respectability, if badly used, is not to be supposed of a sensible man. The dignity of his character will, it is true, set off to advantage the moderate actions of his successor; but unless meanness be prevented by the inculcation of good principles, this advantage will be lost; and the splendour of his own character and actions, will serve only to make the meanness of his successor more noticed and more glaring. But the man who would make his family respectable, should not content himself

with having his children merely free from base qualities; he should aim at making them excellent; at endowing them with such qualities as will not only maintain, but advance the respectability of his name, by their services to society. The man who is born in the possession of fortune and of family of respectability, possesses advantages, by a proper use of which he may render the most important services to society. He is the one to introduce improvements in the arts into practice, to undertake public works, and to lend the authority of his name to all useful undertakings: he is to be the patron of genius, and the promoter of literature: his example may be made use of to recommend virtue to all classes of society, by showing the great, that it will add to their dignity, and the little, that it will increase their happiness. Indeed, there is hardly a worthy object which a man of these advantages may not promote better than others. But if we consider the number of methods by which such men may be useful, and, at the same time, reflect on the fewness of examples of usefulness exhibited by them, we shall find the greatest reason to rejoice that the splendour of fancied greatness, like the colours of the soap bubble, last but a moment.

E. O.

Messrs. Editors,

I HAVE often looked about for a subject, on which to appear in your paper, and have as often been disappointed. *Chance*, however, at last suggested what I had searched for in vain.

The difficulty of selecting a subject for composition, is experimentally known to all who have made the attempt; and is what, from your situ-

ation, I presume you have yourselves often experienced. We are informed by Johnson, that it is often the fate of those who furnish regular essays, to be called upon for a number, before they have thought of a subject; and when their essay should be ready for the press, they yet have to select a topic. Thus hurried, they are compelled to adopt whatever chance may suggest; and in this way are often led to express sentiments, and support opinions, which their reason, when more at leisure, would condemn. Nor is it to the writer of short essays alone, that chance often suggests a subject. Many books which have made a noise in the world, have, I suspect, had a similar origin. Mr. Hume informs us, that the first hint of his celebrated essay upon miracles, was suggested at a Jesuit's College in France; where, in answer to some nonsensical miracles pretended to have been performed in their convent, he urged the argument, which he afterwards reduced to a regular essay. All who have composed, have probably complained of the difficulty of choosing a subject; and most know by experience, that what they have, for days, sought for with pain and labour, has at last been suggested by some remark in an author, or by some hint in conversation. Thus fortuitously has the subject of a composition been started, when the most painful and laboured efforts have been made in vain.

While engaged in these considerations, I was led to reflect how great a part of our lives, our characters, our occupations and pursuits, depend on a like casual concurrence of circumstances; a concurrence, which it is equally out of the reach of our sagacity to foresee, or our power to con-

trol. To such a concurrence may be attributed some of the most memorable actions which the world has ever witnessed.

"Genius," says Johnson, "is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determin'd to some particular direction." The accidents which give genius its direction, often lie wholly out of the knowledge or power of him who possesses it. Boerhaave, who was the most eminent physician of his time, prepared himself, by a long and laborious course of study, for the church; from which he was diverted by an accident, no less honourable to himself in its origin, than disgraceful to those who used it to counteract and defeat his designs. Instances indeed to prove this point, need not be multiplied. Examples have occurred, within the experience of most, of men who, from the humblest beginnings, have, by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, risen to distinction in some of the learned professions.

It was very justly observed by Cromwell, that a man never rises higher than when he knows not whither he is going. Of the truth of this remark, his own life and actions were a strong example. Who would have thought that such as actually followed, would have been the consequences of *one man's* not embarking for America? Had he come to America when he designed it, perhaps those revolutions under which England so long laboured, would have been prevented; and Cromwell, instead of being "damn'd to everlasting fame," might have lived beloved and respected, and died with the praises of the good. There is indeed no proof, that when he commenced his opposition to tyranny, that he thought of bringing

about that change in the national affairs, which afterwards ensued, and in which he acted so conspicuous a part. The probability is, that he did not; but that his ambition increased as the opportunities of gratifying it were multiplied; until at last he could be satisfied with nothing less than absolute power. Were it necessary, it might be shown, that many of the great heroes of ancient and modern times, have risen to distinction in a similar way.

But why do I seek examples on this head from history, when so many lie nearer home; and which are the more striking, because more nearly connected with our own feelings and experience? I appeal to those who have nearly closed their collegiate life, and ask them by what steps they became members of this college? Did they, when they began the rudiments of learning, expect to receive a liberal education? Was this the purpose with which they began study? Or is it not the fact, that their being members of college is, in the greater number of instances, matter of chance rather than design; the result of accident rather than of any early and settled purpose to acquire a liberal education? At first, the intention was only to get a slight acquaintance with some of the elementary branches of knowledge. Having gained these points, the next remove, perhaps, was to a superficial acquaintance with the languages; and from the study of these, choice or persuasion has fixed them in their present situation. Such is the account which many students could give of the manner in which they came to hold the places they now occupy. Thus is it that we pass from one stage of life to another, not knowing at one step where we may

go the next. When from college we shall have passed into the world, the same or similar accidents which have directed our steps hitherto, will be found still to influence the tenor of our lives. Many who have already planned out their future occupations, and the character they are to support, will be diverted from the course which they have now marked out; and at the end of twenty years find themselves something, of which now they have not the most distant idea.

Such, to a superficial observer, may appear to be the course of our existence. But, with the more serious and thoughtful, chance gives place to design. To the pious and devout Christian, these facts assume a very different aspect. If, in conformity with the language of the world, he sometimes ascribes to chance important events, he nevertheless feels and knows, that what appears to us the result of a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances, is really the effect of Supreme Wisdom; the consequence of a superintending Providence, whose character it is to educe good out of evil, and to make all things turn to the good of his intelligent creation.

H.

IN a former communication on Novels, I contented myself with stating an *historical* fact, illustrative of their effects on the literary character of female readers, and forbore advertising to any of their moral evils; as Miss H. Moore has treated of them so ably, and has taken greater liberties with her own sex, than I dare attempt. My intention of restraining from this part of the subject is still the same, although I have since had reason to believe that the authority alluded to is not considered so or-

thodox among this class of readers, as I had before imagined.

High as Miss Hannah Moore stands in the ranks of female literature, and praiseworthy as are undoubtedly her intentions, yet an apparently awe-compelling severity is coupled with her name ; and so far has fear triumphed over esteem, that many a timorous fair one has not scrupled to call her a very *virago*. To those entertaining these sentiments, it is not wonderful that neither the lady nor her advice should be very acceptable ; and a female novel reader would be as likely to finish one of Barrow's long sermons, as to get through her treatise on Female Education—I say *through*, because, although there are many discreet misses who have read it, yet, in the perusal, so many chapters were considered episodical, and consequently omitted—so many that with more propriety might have found a place in a volume of Park-street lectures—so many incidents that seemed to mar the unity of the plan—so many circumstances that retarded the catastrophe of the story, (as the getting through such a volume is, with some readers, a most joyous catastrophe)—together with a dozen other epic criticisms applied to Miss Hannah's plain prose, that the completion of the work becomes no ordinary achievement.

Even among those who are inclined to think the lady "a good sort of a woman," there are not wanting prejudices ; and yet I can venture to say that she will improve wonderfully on acquaintance. She has written many valuable tracts, which might be referred to at times which afforded no amusement ; when, for instance, the trash of a circulating library was exhausted, or a rainy day prevented the payment or reception of visits.

If, however, a wet or cloudy day could be more agreeably employed, or the family physician might think it dangerous to increase the soporific influence of a north-east storm, by such anti-stimulant applications ; yet they might be resorted to with signal advantage during the interval that elapses between the notification of a new novel's being committed to the press, and the morning when "This day is published," &c. flames in characters as large as life on the door-posts of every bookseller's shop in the city. Used at this period, they will contribute greatly to calm the spirits of expectancy, and neutralize that *acidity* of temper resulting from "hope deferred."

My belief that Miss Moore is no favourite among her own sex, arose from the following circumstance :—Happening in a circle, a few evenings since, in which the conversation turned on literary subjects, and particularly on the merits of female authors, I asked a lady who sat by me, whether she had read Miss Moore's works ? " *Parson* Hannah's ?" replied she. A little startled at the epithet, and not knowing with my informant that the lady had taken orders, I hesitated a moment ; but recollecting that the worthy Pope Joan had filled the chair of St. Peter, I thought it was nothing wonderful, if a snug little corner in the garden of episcopacy should have rewarded the indefatigable efforts of this friend of virtue, and therefore answered, "The same." "No, (was her answer,) it isn't fashionable for ladies to study *Theology*."

F. A. J.

POETRY.

The following piece was suggested by the late beautiful appearance of the trees and shrubbery, when ornamented with all the brilliancy which the sun could create on the too fatal incrustation of ice.

"Sic transit gloria mundi."

STERN Winter had breath'd o'er the landscape of green,
And wither'd its glories away;
No longer the grove's "leafy honours" were seen,
Nor the verdure to gladden the day.

But the desolate forest trees, widow'd and bare,
Groan'd sad in the ruffian blast;
And the aspect of Nature, late blooming and fair,
In the whiteness of death lay aghast.

E'en Winter beheld the sad change with a sigh,
And relented for what she had done;
"Strange tears" trickled down from the pitying sky,
And smiles fled the face of the sun,

But the torrents of Pity gush'd freely in vain,
They congeal'd beneath Winter's chill breath;
And instead of restoring to vigour again,
Merely gilt the pale visage of death.

The lucid drops frozen to crystalline gems,
Hung glittering on ev'ry spray;
And clustering brilliants, in rich diadems,
Seem'd the grove's leafy loss to repay.

But a new flood of glory soon burst on the sight,
When the sun shed his smiles o'er the scene;
The sapphire, and em'rald, and ruby dame'd bright,
And each hue of the rainbow was seen.

Yet a "sickening splendour" this glory appears,
When the terrible winds howl around;
The gem-burden'd growth of a lustrum of years,
Falls, with heart-giving crash, to the ground.

Thus the splendour of riches, of learning, or fame,
Bow man's grovelling mind to the dust;
His honours o'er-burthen his tottering frame,
And he sinks by prosperity curst.

VERSE.

TO SLEEP.

I.

COME, gentle Sleep, thou foe to care,
Thy best and fairest image wear,
And close my weary eyes;
Lock'd in thy soul-composing arms,
No griefs distress—no fear alarms;
But peaceful visions rise.

2.

In sleep the greatest joy we know;
Most pure, most unalloy'd with woe,
Most like Elysian bliss.

Of home, of dearest friends to dream,
And see their eyes with gladness beam,
What joy can equal this?

3.

In sleep the warrior's bosom warms;
He seems to grasp his ready arms,
And hasten to the wars:
He fancies all his foes laid low,
He feels the victor's gen'rous glow,
And counts his glorious scars.

4.

The patriot hears his country's call;
He sees her foes, around him, fall,
And all her wrongs redress'd:
He sees in peace his country smile—
The pleasing scene his cares beguile;
He feels e'en more than blest.

5.

In sleep, the lover oft has prest
The blushing maiden to his breast,
And felt the ardent kiss:
His heart feels purest rapture's glow,
He feels true love's extatic flow,
What dear, surpassing bliss!

6.

And Adam too, first in a dream,
Beheld his Eve, fair, lovely, beam
With fond delight and love:
So fair, so beauteous was she seen,
So noble, graceful was her mien,
She seem'd one from above.

7.

If such the joys which dreams bestow,
And such the pleasures which we know,
When wrapt in slumbers soft,
Then come, sweet Sleep, and hold me fast
Until my spirit wings its last
And airy flight aloft.

SUN-SET.

INCREASING through the western sky,
Behold the light-hair'd sun descend;
Before his face the shadows fly,
Behind his ear the clouds attend:
Why, Phœbus, sinking to thy bed,
Why is thy face so very red?

Midst orbs of light to thine but small,
Thy wheels revolve, thy coursers rush;
Exalted o'er Earth's little ball,
'Tis strange the god of day should blush;
Strange! No—the cause we all may find;
He's just been looking on mankind!